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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000049

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: BASRA INTELLIGENCE CHIEF ON LOCAL AND FOREIGN THREATS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jim Shearer, Deputy Leader, PRT Basra, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary
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¶1. (C) In a September 6 meeting, Colonel Hazam, head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service's Fusion Center for the Basra region, called the special cells of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) the biggest security threat in southern Iraq and said Baathists and other insurgent groups were infiltrating their ranks to advance their own agendas. Commenting on foreign interference in Iraqi affairs, he said that Iran was a bigger and more sophisticated threat than Syria, and was using ISCI as a strategic ally to advance its goals. Hazam predicted an increase in violence leading up to the January national elections, and saw the recent attacks as a signal to PM Maliki to reconsider his refusal to join the Iraqi National Coalition. Hazam assessed Basra's security forces as better prepared and more capable to counter the expected spike in violence, but said that insurgent infiltrators were still present within their ranks, including in senior positions. Our dealings with Colonel Hazam has shown his intelligence on threats to be highly accurate, and his methods for flushing out the terrorist very effective. End summary.

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Baathists Pump Up the JAM
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¶2. (C) Hazam gave an assessment of the security threat in southern Iraq. He divided enemy forces into two groups -- the Iranian-backed JAM and all other groups. Hazam stated that the special cells of JAM are a constant threat, one he deals with daily. In the "other" category, Hazam included hard-core Baathists, the Badr Corps, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AIQ), and other unspecified groups. While still a threat, he said these groups had become less active than JAM of late. In fact, Hazam said that with so little activity coming from them, the security forces had been "poking" these groups to elicit useful information on their membership and possible plans. AQI's profile in particular, said Hazam, was much lower as a result of a shift in its attention to Afghanistan. AIQ, however, remained a threat since it still maintained sleeper cells in Iraq that could be activated at any time.

¶3. (C) Hazam said that the Baathists and other insurgent groups were infiltrating special cells of JAM and using them as a platform to advance their own agendas. Though the specific agendas of the various groups differed, they all shared common goals:

- to weaken the central government;
- to prove that the political groups supporting the attackers still had the power to create chaos, and could not be ignored;

and,

- to create instability in Iraq that would scare off potential foreign investors; (Hazam cited the early September mortar attack on a refinery outside of Basra as the latest "message to foreign companies" to stay away).

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Iran and Syria: Pursuing Same Goals, Using Different Means

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¶4. (C) Commenting on foreign interference in Iraqi affairs, Hazam stated that all of Iraq's neighbors benefitted from its insecurity and would welcome the failure of its democracy. He said that Syria was supporting forces trying to destabilize Iraq, but not to the same degree as Iran. In addition to supporting insurgents, Iran was using all available means -- political, economic, and diplomatic -- to exert influence in Iraq. As the latest evidence of Iran's ill intentions toward Iraq, Hazam cited a cache of 1,500 Iranian-made IEDs and numerous launchers recently seized in al-Amarah. He stated that since ISCI was involved the Bloody Wednesday bombings in Baghdad, Iran was greatly benefitting from PM Maliki's scape-goating of Syria.

¶5. (C) Hazam said that Iran was using ISCI as a strategic ally in advancing its goals. He said that recent change in ISCI party leadership would not alter this relationship since Iran had strong connections throughout party structure that ensured its influence within ISCI. Hazam said that PM Maliki had not politically exploited the change in ISCI leadership or the involvement of one of ISCI Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi's body guards in the July 28 Rafidain Bank robbery in Baghdad, in which eight people were killed. He said that Maliki understands that going after ISCI in any way would cross a red line with Iran.

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Better Means to Counter the Expected Increase in Violence

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¶6. (C) Hazam predicted an increase in violence leading up to the January national elections. He expected a spike in assassination attempts from the Badr Corps against political opponents. He also foresaw a rise in general violence aimed at sabotaging the economy and creating a sense of insecurity. Much of the recent violence, according to Hazam, could be seen as a signal to Maliki to reconsider his refusal to join the Iraqi National Coalition, the successor to the Shiite-dominated UIC.

¶7. (C) Asked to assess the ability of Basra security forces to counter the expected spike in violence, Hazam said that they were more willing to fight and much better at conducting surgical strikes as a result of experience gained in the April/May 2008 Charge of the Knights campaign. He believed that these forces had managed to rid themselves of many low-level infiltrators from insurgent groups, but likely still had some infiltrators serving at much higher levels, making the infiltrators potentially more effective and dangerous.

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Comment

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¶8. (C) We have had multiple interactions with Colonel Hazam. His intelligence on terrorist threats has been highly accurate, and his methods on flushing out terrorists have proven very effective.
SHEARER